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ABSTRACT

This document is comprised of a training package to help practitioners strengthen relationships with parents. Designed for use with direct service staff and their supervisors from various programs, the package can be used for group training or in individual training and supervision. The package has three components: (1) a 22-minute videotape with 7 vignettes of providers and families working together to show how strong, collaborative relationships with families look and feel; (2) a companion book for providers serving young children and their families; and (3) a videotape guide. The vignettes presented in the videotape focus on the following themes: (1) use what you know; (2) point out the positive; (3) take time to listen; (4) acknowledge parents' feelings; (5) refocus issues on the child; (6) understand parents' view of their child; and (7) ask for help. The video guide outlines a general framework for discussion that applies to all the vignettes and poses additional exploration and application questions for specific vignettes. Throughout the accompanying book on partnering with parents are references to vignettes from the videotape and reflective questions to help staff think about how the situations portrayed in the vignettes relate to their own work. The chapters of the book are: (1) "All The Things You Already Do Make a Difference for Families"; (2) "Interactions Have an Important Impact on Your Work"; (3) "Behavior Has Meaning (You Just Don't Always Know Right Away What It Means)"; and (4) "Learning and Growing Together with Families." The materials emphasize that being considerate, interested, curious, and respectful of parents is the most important thing providers can do--for their relationship with the parent and with the child. (KB)

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# Learning & Growing Together with Families: Partnering with Parents To Support Young Children's Development [with] Video Guide: Seven Ways To Build Strong Relationships [Videotape].

Jeree H. Pawl
Amy L. Dombro

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# Learning & Growing Together *with families:*

# *Partnering With Parents to Support Young Children's Development*

*By Jeree H. Pawl and Amy L. Dombro*

PS 030495

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Learning & Growing Together *with families:*

# *Partnering With Parents to Support Young Children's Development*

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# A Beginning

Appreciating What You Do ..... 3

# Chapter 1:

## All the Things You Already Do Make a Difference for Families

Even the Little Things Matter ..... 5
Appreciating Your Effect on Families ..... 6
Appreciating Families' Effect on You ..... 8
Exercises for Learning & Growing ..... 8
Learning From the Video ..... 8
Summing Up ..... 9

# Chapter 2:

## Interactions Have an Important Impact on Your Work

Messages Can Be Sent Directly ..... 11
Messages Can Be Sent Indirectly ..... 12
Becoming Aware of the Impact That Words and Actions Have on You ..... 13
- Maintaining Balance

Becoming Aware of the Impact Your Words and Actions Have on Others ..... 16
- You Are Very Important to Families

Appreciating Different Beliefs and Perspectives ..... 18
People Don't Always "Hear" What You Intend to Communicate ..... 19
Misunderstandings Can Be Opportunities to Learn and Grow Together ..... 20
Exercises for Learning & Growing Together ..... 21
Learning From the Video ..... 22
Summing Up ..... 23

# Chapter 3:

## Behavior Has Meaning
## (You Just Don't Always Know Right Away What It Means)

Careful Observation Is Essential ..... 27
Being Aware of the Influence of Early Relationships and Experiences ..... 28
Being Aware of Attitudes and Beliefs ..... 29
Your Reactions Are Important ..... 31
Parents Need to Be Noticed, Too ..... 33
Exercises for Learning & Growing ..... 34
Learning From the Video ..... 35
Summing Up ..... 36

# Chapter 4:

## Learning and Growing Together With Families

Your Interactions With Families Shape Their Ideas About Themselves ..... 38
Paying Attention to Both Parent and Child ..... 40
Appreciating a Child Supports Both Children and Parents ..... 40
Exercises for Learning & Growing ..... 42
Learning From the Video ..... 42
Summing Up ..... 43

# A Beginning

*Billy stares down at his new little baby, Joey, who is sound asleep (is he breathing?). He and his wife, May, are getting ready to take Joey home from the hospital. As he looks at this 2-day-old little fellow, he feels a bit scared and not sure that he'll be a good enough father.*

"Hey there," he says, "You know you haven't got a rich or fancy daddy. I'm just a really plain guy but I'm working hard. I'm not perfect, but I'm trying to do better and you are one good reason, you and your ma. Now your momma, she's really smart and so sweet—you're gonna love her."

May comes out of the bathroom, and looks around, puzzled. "Billy, who are you talking to? Is that visitor woman still here? That Tammy?"

"No, she stepped out. I'm just talking to Joey about who we are. We're getting to know each other."

"Oh, Billy isn't he just dear—just perfect?"

"Yeah, he sure is. . . . May, are you scared at all? I mean, we're all he has. We'll have to do it all. I don't know anything about babies. What if I get to actin' like my old man?"

"Don't worry so much, Billy. You aren't like that. You'll be a good daddy. We'll figure it out together. Look, he's already turning his head to look at us."

"Do you think he knows us?"

"Tammy says he knows our voices 'cause he could hear them for months, inside. So we're not all new! Do you want to hold him, Billy?"

"I'm kinda sweaty. I came straight from the site to pick you up."

"He doesn't care. You're his daddy."

Billy smiles and picks up Joey, cradling him while May presses close to them.

Tammy, the family support worker, walks into the room after a soft knock. "It's me. You folks seem about ready to leave. Look at you. You sure make a nice picture. How's it feeling to have someone new join your family?"

"Billy and I were just noticing how Joey pays attention to our voices and stares at us so serious."

"And I was saying to May I'm just not feeling so sure how I will be. You know, like I told you earlier."

"I know you're worried. This is new for everybody. But you know, I can see that you really care about each other and how you both care about Joey. That's the best start he could have. We'll talk more when I come visit you tomorrow at home."

We start here because it's where we ***all*** start. From the moment a child is born, the relationships that surround him create the environment in which he develops. This includes his relationships with those significant people who care for him, and also the adults' relationships with each other.

Billy's and May's baby is off to a good start. He has parents who care a lot about each other and about being good parents. They already feel Joey is an active member of his family. Even though Billy has some concerns about his ability to be a good father, he is eager to work on being the best he can be. They also have someone, Tammy, whom they can count on and talk to as they try to create a good and safe world for their baby, one in which Joey will feel important, and will come to expect good things from people.

## Appreciating What You Do

As their circle of relationships grows, every connection children build, and each interaction they have, will be shaped by what has gone before. Even as adults, we still carry inside the important sense of ourselves and of others that we learned early, however exaggerated or diminished over time. All of what happens to us matters. Those basic emotional colors that are our early experiences are present in our self-portraits today.

*Learning & Growing Together With Families: Partnering With Parents to Support Young Children's Development* is based on this understanding—that the relationships you build with the children and families you serve make an important difference in their lives, and in yours, too. These relationships encourage parents and children to grow, and in the process you also will learn and change. In contrast to other early childhood training materials where the primary focus is on child development, this book emphasizes the power and potential of building strong relationships with parents. (Please note that throughout this book "parents" refers to any adult who has primary caretaking responsibility for a child.)

You may be a staff person at an Early Head Start program, an early intervention specialist, a home visitor, or a caregiver in a child care program or family child care home. Although the focus of your work may be different, you all share significant responsibilities and possibilities when you join with children and their parents.

Parents and children alike are developing in important ways each day. They are learning about one another and creating their relationships. When you come into their world, either over time or at significant moments, you play a role in what is being created. Whether it is your goal or not, you do not stand outside these families, you become a part of their pictures of themselves and each other. Each interaction is an opportunity for you to make parents and children feel heard, appreciated, and understood. The more you appreciate your important role, the more positive and rewarding your joining together can be for all of you.

*Partnering With Parents to Support Young Children's Development* invites you to think about and explore your everyday interactions with the diverse parents and children with whom you work. This exploration is about understanding parents and children. But it is also about understanding yourself, becoming aware of the influences that have shaped your own beliefs, and recognizing what you bring to the relationship. Working in this way can make your work both more rewarding and less stressful.

We start, in Chapter 1, by looking at how much you already know and do that makes a difference for families.

*Each interaction is an opportunity for you to make parents and children feel heard, appreciated, and understood.*

*Note: This book is available separately and also as part of the* Learning & Growing Together With Families Video Package, *which includes the video* Seven Ways to Build Strong Relationships *and accompanying video guide. The 22-minute video, through seven vignettes of providers and families working together, shows how strong, collaborative relationships with families look and feel. Throughout this book you will see references to vignettes from the video (see "Learning from the Video" sections) along with reflective questions to help you think about how the situations portrayed in the vignettes relate to your own work.*

# Chapter 1:
# All the Things You Already Do Make a Difference For Families

*In this chapter we are going to take a look at the many things you do each day. You'll see that much of what you already do, the little things and the big things, can make a difference in the lives of the families and children you work with. Becoming aware of these things, and the impact they can have, allows you to be more purposeful about what you say and do, and to more fully appreciate yourself and your work.*

## Even the Little Things Matter

However you spend your days — providing for children in child care, helping families who have children with developmental challenges, or making home visits to provide family support — your days are filled with ***doing***.

What did you do at work today? Jot down the first three things that come to mind. Rate on a scale from 1-5 how important you think each was, with "1" being not important at all and "5" being very important.

Here are what some other practitioners working with infants, toddlers, and families have to say about the things they do:

> A staff member of an Early Head Start program: "I changed lots of diapers, took a walk to the park with some children, and called the family of a toddler who started running a high fever."
>
> An early intervention specialist: "My main focus yesterday was getting a baby to lift his head and look at the interesting toys I was showing him."

A home visitor: "I brought ingredients and made play dough with an almost 3-year-old and his mother. I talked with the mother about ways to help her new baby calm himself, and then we all read *Bugs, Bugs, Bugs* by Margaret Wise Brown together."

It is likely that your list is full of actions — full of activities and of tasks begun and perhaps completed. All of these things are important. They make up daily routines and are steps you take to meet various goals. But they are only a part of the story of your workday.

## Appreciating Your Effect on Families

Your work is not merely what you do, but ***how you are*** as you do it. It is about the feelings and emotions you experience as you interact with others, in exchanges throughout the day that you may not even think about, or perhaps not think of as very important.

- How many people do you think you interacted with today?
- Think of one specific interaction.
- What are some of the feelings you experienced during this encounter?
- What are some of the feelings you think the other person experienced?

All day long you constantly interact with the people around you. Your interactions may leave you feeling distressed, amused, tired, cross, contented, annoyed, satisfied, curious, and/or puzzled. You enjoy some of the people you encounter, find others tiresome, and still others difficult or annoying.

Sarah, a child care provider, is feeding Carl. On her "What I Did Today" list, Sarah would write, "I fed Carl." But Carl would have a different report.

Of course Carl cannot really put his feelings into words yet, but he certainly does have them.

These are the things Carl may be experiencing:

**She waits while I swallow.**
**She smiles in my eyes.**
**She likes what she sees.**
**She talks a little while I rest and entertains my ears.**
**She notices when I've had enough.**
**She thinks I'm important.**
**She cares what I want.**
**She figures out what I want.**
**She is a people.**
**People are good.**

Clearly, Sarah's interactions with Carl have given him some important messages about who he is and about what he can expect from others. How likely is Sarah to have put any of this on her list?

Think of an interaction you had with a child today.
- What do you think that child may have been thinking and feeling?
- Is there anything about this on the "What I Did Today" list you made earlier?

Mrs. Tilden has been sick for a few days and unable to get out of the house. Jane, who is her home visitor, stopped by a local food bank and has brought Mrs. Tilden the diapers and food that she had called to tell Jane she needed.

While Jane is handing Mrs. Tilden these things, Mrs. Tilden is having an internal dialogue in her head. Here are some of the things she might be thinking:

**Jane really acts like I'm worth something.**
**I can't believe anyone really took me seriously.**
**I need this stuff and I get it — that's a first.**
**She's gone out of her way to get this.**
**I wonder why she did this?**

Mrs. Tilden also says Jane made her feel as if she mattered, that she could be heard, and that someone would go out of their way for her. This surprised and puzzled her. She liked it, but was not sure what to make of it.

How likely is it that Jane put any of what Mrs. Tilden experienced on her list of what she did that day?

Think of an interaction you had with a family member today.
- What do you think this person may have been thinking and feeling?
- How do you think the interaction affected that person?
- Is there anything about this interaction on your "What I Did Today" list?

*Your work is not merely what you do, but how you are as you do it. It is about the feelings and emotions you experience as you interact with others, in exchanges throughout the day that you may not even think about, or perhaps not think of as very important.*

## Appreciating Families' Effect on You

Clearly in our illustrations so far, we have told only half of the story. It is not only Carl and Mrs. Tilden who had "inside commentaries"; so did Sarah and Jane. They, too, had a rich array of feelings, thoughts, and questions as they did their work. They were also experiencing this time in their own special ways.

Go back to your list. Choose one of the activities or tasks you listed and think about all of the things you were thinking and feeling during that time.

## Exercises for Learning & Growing

**Pay special attention to an interaction you have tomorrow.**

- As it is happening, imagine that you have a "thought balloon" over your head. Think about or make a simple drawing that captures your feelings and experience. What does your thought balloon say?

**Observe a colleague during an interaction with a child or parent.**

- Jot down one or two things you think your colleague might be feeling.
- When you have a quiet moment, ask what he/she experienced.
- How does what *you* thought compare to what your colleague tells you?
- How do you think your colleague's interaction may have supported a child and family?

**Think of a recent conversation with someone at home or work. Try to imagine thought balloons over both of your heads.**

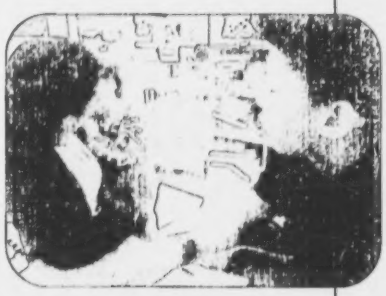
- What might the balloon "say" that the person might not have spoken?
- What would your balloon "say" that you might not have spoken?

**Take a relaxing walk-and-talk with a colleague.**

- Share something you noticed he or she did at work recently — be it with another colleague, a parent, or a child — that you appreciated or thought was helpful.
- Ask what he or she thought about what you had noticed.

## Learning From the Video

Look at the first vignette in the *Seven Ways to Build Strong Relationships* video, "Use What You Know." In this vignette you see Erika Weaver, a child care provider, ease the separation between 2-year-old Elizabeth and her mother, Judith.



- Look at the hustle and bustle at the beginning of the day and imagine all the important feelings that this parent, child, and caregiver are experiencing. What feelings are being communicated but not spoken?
- What might Erika put on her list of what she did this morning?
- What did you see in the video that gives you clues about the impact Erika's actions have on Elizabeth? On Judith? On herself?
- Do you think Erika fully appreciated the importance of what she had done?
- How did Erika use what she knows about this family to help them?
- What do you think it took for Erica to stop herself from immediately taking Elizabeth from her mother? Why was waiting important?

## Summing Up

There are many things you do in the course of your busy days that are experienced by people in important ways. This is not always the way we think about what we do, yet it is a way of becoming aware of how important the tasks you do, and the interactions you have, really are. Increasing this awareness is also a way of developing the greater appreciation for yourself and your work that you deserve.

Now, in Chapter 2, we take a closer look at the impact you have on families and the impact they have on you.

# Chapter 2:
# Interactions Have an Important Impact on Your Work

*Working with young children and their parents involves not only a range of skills, but personal interactions that are full of meaning for everyone involved. Everything you do somehow engages the personalities, beliefs, likes, and dislikes of the people you are interacting with. The more you are aware of the impact that everyone has on everyone else, and on you, the more prepared you are to react as thoughtfully and usefully as possible.*

This awareness is a vital part of creating cooperative, respectful relationships with parents. It will help you build connections with parents that then shape the kinds of interactions they have with their children. The children, families, and colleagues you work with make up a unique world of differences and samenesses, harmonies and disharmonies. Paying attention to the music that is created helps you decide what notes to sing.

## Messages Can Be Sent Directly

Sometimes people say very directly what they want you to hear.

A father is talking to his son's speech therapist.

The father says, "I wanted to let you know how much it helped me to understand better about George's stuttering. It's helped me to follow through on not pressuring him so much."

The speech therapist responds, "I'm so glad. We'll continue to check in regularly and make sure we both understand how it's going. Thanks for telling me."

*Any exchange you have with someone with whom you have a relationship evokes feelings. You may feel bored, delighted, irritated, pleased, or many other things. The feelings may be strong or very slight. You may be aware of them or hardly aware at all.*

A mother is standing at the door in her nightgown. An early interventionist is standing on the doorstep with her kit.

The early interventionist says, "Hello, Mrs. Wood. It looks like I woke you up."

The mother says, "Yeah, I forgot you were coming. It's been really busy and I can't meet today. I've got a lot of important things to do."

Think about the interactions above.
- How do you think the speech therapist might feel?
- How do you think the early interventionist might feel?

Think about similar experiences you have had.
- How did each make you feel?

## Messages Can Be Sent Indirectly

There are times when people's feelings are conveyed not so much in words but by their behaviors:

A woman is coming out of her kitchen with a wrapped plate of cookies. A home visitor is sitting on the couch with a toddler looking up at her.

The mother says, "I made these cookies before you came and thought you'd like to take some back to your place."

The home visitor says, "Hey, that's really nice. Everybody will like that. Thanks so much."

A woman is at the sink washing dishes with her back towards a home visitor who is sitting at the kitchen table. A baby is asleep in a "bouncy seat" on the floor.

The home visitor says, "Maybe we could sit here for a bit and talk about some of the ideas we had for things you and Jeremy can do outside together."

The mother replies, "I forget. Remind me while I get a start on this stack of dishes. I can hear you okay."

Think of a time when someone's feelings were conveyed to you through their actions.
- How did it make you feel?
- What message did you "hear"?
- How did you react?

At other times someone may say or do something indirectly which nonetheless can have the power to make you feel noticed and appreciated, or overlooked and unappreciated. Listen to and imagine these parents and think about what their words and behaviors might convey to you if you were working with them.

A young woman with a baby is sitting on the front stoop of her apartment. Her home visitor walks up.

The home visitor says, "You're outside!"

The mother replies, "I knew you'd be here in a few minutes so I thought I'd come out here and wait for you."

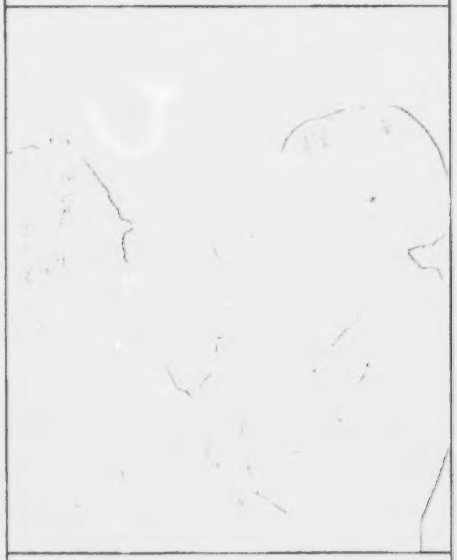
It is the end of the day in a child care program. A mother is holding her baby and a caregiver is talking to her.

The caregiver says, "She had another really wonderful day today. That's five in a row. Bye-bye, Penny. Goodbye, Julie."

The mother says, "Goodbye, Sandra – uh uh – Janet – I mean ..."

The provider says, "It's Susan."

A mother notices a caregiver's new haircut as she drops her child off in the morning. She says, "Hey, you got a new haircut. It looks great!"



## Becoming Aware of the Impact That Words and Actions Have on You

Any exchange you have with someone with whom you have a relationship evokes feelings. You may feel bored, delighted, irritated, pleased, or many other things. The feelings may be strong or very slight. You may be aware of them or hardly aware at all.

Sometimes one difficult interaction can outweigh a lot of good interactions and leave you feeling confused, frustrated, upset, and/or angry. Some people tend to notice and remember the bad feelings and the good feelings get lost. For others, it's the opposite.

Think about today.
- Which interactions stand out?
- Make a list of the moments that felt good and those that felt bad.
- Which things came to mind first? Why?
- Does it seem easier to remember the good moments or the bad ones?

When you make an effort to be aware of your feelings as you are interacting with people, you can have more control over how you respond to them. This sense of control can make your work richer and more satisfying.

## Maintaining Balance

What people say and do that affects you can be big, but also surprisingly small. Becoming aware of the impact other people have on you helps you stay in balance. If, for instance, someone says something that distresses you, but you don't really register it at the moment, it can color your whole day. When you ***know*** and ***understand*** how something is affecting you, you can ***choose*** how you want to respond. This balance can help you maintain positive relationships with the children and families you serve. Below, Tom, a caregiver in a child care center, uses his awareness to stay in balance.

*What people say and do that affects you can be big, but also surprisingly small. Becoming aware of the impact other people have on you helps you stay in balance.*

**Marcy** (Tom's colleague): "Morning, Tom. Boy, I am so tired."

**Tom:** "Me, too. I don't know why I slept so lousy. I'm afraid I was slow getting set up. Would you mind checking the other room?"

**Marcy:** "Sure, no problem."

Just then Tanya Scott rushes in with her 23-month-old son, Vinny. It's 10 minutes before the center officially opens. Tanya is leaning forward hauling Vinny along. Vinny is leaning back as far as he can. Their faces both look the same: stubborn, cross, and unhappy.

**Vinny:** "No-oooo. No wanna. No wanna. No wanna."

Vinny's face squinches up even more, his lower lip shoots out, he begins to cry and drops to his bottom.

**Tanya,** sighing disgustedly: "Vinny, why do have to make everything so hard?"

**Tanya,** turns to Tom: "He's all yours. I have ***really*** important stuff to do today — the biggest inventory count of the year and I don't have time to make nice to him."

**Tanya,** turning toward Vinny: "Sorry, Baby — Mommy's got important work to do. I'll see you later. You go to Tom."

It all happens so fast that Tom barely has time to react.

**Tom:** "Wait . . . hey . . . Tanya," he says. "You . . . I think . . . hey."

The door closes behind Tanya. Now Tom looks as cross as Tanya and Vinny had. He looks down at Vinny, still crying, looking up at him.

**Tom:** "It's okay, little man. Let's go see what Marcy is doing. You can help us get going here." He picks up Vinny and they go to join and help Marcy.

Later, Marcy and Tom are talking during their lunch break:

**Marcy:** "Is something wrong?"

**Tom:** "No, I'm just tired."

**Marcy:** "Me, too. But all morning it has seemed like you're not quite here."

**Tom:** "Well, I guess I'm thinking a lot — about this job. I love the kids but sometimes I'm not sure it's worth it. Maybe I should do something else. I was really bummed out at Tanya this morning for dumping Vinny off like that. Poor kid. It just got to me."

**Marcy:** "It's hardly the first time."

**Tom:** "Yeah, but this time it really hit me hard. Maybe it was 'cause she said her work was so important — not just the dumping. She acted like what she does matters and that I'm just a convenience, here to serve her. I think that's what got me down. I have to think about it more. Now how about sharing part of that great looking cookie?"

**Marcy:** "Well, since you're feeling bad, you can have this other half, too, because I think what we do is *very* important."

Later, when Tanya comes to pick up Vinny, Tom takes her aside:

**Tom:** "About this morning. . . ."

**Tanya:** "I know, I know. I shouldn't have shoved Vinny off that way. It's not good for him, but I had this important thing. . . . "

**Tom:** "Well, the thing is . . . it's not just about Vinny. . . . "

**Tanya:** "What?"

**Tom:** "Well, it's kind of hard to say, . . . but it's also about my feelings. I have a job, too — and it's important. Sometimes I don't think you really appreciate that."

**Tanya:** "Oh, Tom. I'm sorry. I guess I wasn't very nice, was I?"

**Tom:** "That's okay; but we're going to need to figure out how to do things together. For Vinny, for me, and for you."

Think about the interaction above:

- Does it make a difference that Tom figured out why he was feeling and acting "not quite here"?
- What might have happened if he hadn't figured this out?
- Can you think of an interaction like Tom's that colored your experience of other things without your knowing it? If so, how did you discover the connection?
- Are there times when your mood changes but you are not sure why? When was the last time this happened? Can you see any connection to something that happened earlier?

Think of a time when talking with a colleague has helped you deal with difficult feelings.
- What was going on?
- What did your colleague say or do that was helpful?
- Share this story with the colleague who helped you.

## Becoming Aware of the Impact Your Words and Actions Have on Others

When you receive a message, you know what you feel. When you send a message, you can't know for sure how it is going to be experienced by the other person. There are times when even though you say what you mean, it is not what is heard. And, as a result, you may be surprised at how people respond.

The time it takes to try to understand the effect you have on someone is worth the effort. It may explain someone's puzzling response or a look that you hadn't expected, and it gives you information to help you decide what to do next. In the discussion below, we are going to explore a number of ideas that can help you be more aware of yourself as a message-sender.

### You Are Very Important to Families

Parents listen carefully to what you say and do because you are important to them. You are working with their children, whom they care for deeply. So as you interact with parents, it is important to keep in mind what they may be feeling. They may feel vulnerable or be afraid of being judged. They may be looking for answers or some validation of how they're doing as parents and, therefore, they are sensitive to what you say.

The things you say and do affect families. Sometimes the things that have a big impact may seem surprisingly small and may take only a minute to do or say.

A caregiver is greeting a mother and child at the door of a center. She says, "It's good to see you, Sandra. I see that you are up and around. I'm glad you are back on your feet."

Think about this interaction:
- How do you imagine that being greeted this way makes this mother feel?
- What are some of the messages the mother might be "hearing" the caregiver say besides her actual words?
- Do you make it a point to greet the families you work with? Why or why not?
- How might your greeting show that they are important to you?

A mother has just arrived with her 2-year-old daughter at family child care.

The mother is saying, "I'm sorry we're late. I just couldn't get her into her

coat. It's some uncooperative thing she's into lately. Is she the same way here?"

The caregiver says, "No. We never have any trouble with her about her coat or being especially uncooperative."

The mother walks out thinking, "I guess I don't know how to handle my own daughter. I don't know why she's so awful with me. Maybe she's here so much that she's gotten to care more about her than she does about me."

Another mother and child arrive at a different child care program. This mother also is saying that she had trouble getting her child into his coat.

The provider says, "That must be really hard. It is often easier for us. Children always seem the most difficult with the people they care about most. Let's talk about it some more today when you come to pick her up."

This mother walks out thinking, "What a relief! I guess I'm not as bad a mother as I thought. She's so nice. It's good to know she's on my side."

Think back to your conversations with families and staff over the last day.
- List five comments you made.
- Upon reflection, could any of these comments have been more positive or helpful?
- How would you say them differently?

Think about a time when you heard a colleague say something positive and supportive to a parent.
- Why did you like what they said or did?

Think about a time when you heard a colleague say something to parents that made you uncomfortable.
- What about it bothered you? Why?

A parent and child care provider are talking together.

The mother says, "She was doing so well with the bathroom, but now she just seems to be putting it off. I have to fight with her to get her to go. What should I do?"

The caregiver responds, "I don't know. I haven't noticed anything, but I'll ask if anyone else has. I'll pay special attention, and you and I should make a time to think together about what might be going on. I'd like to hear more about what your ideas are."

Think about times when a parent asked you for help or advice:
- Have you ever answered a parent's question with, "I don't know. . . . Let's make a time to think together?" Why or why not?
- How do you imagine it might make a parent feel?

- What effect might looking for an answer about a child's behavior together with a parent have on your relationship?
- How might a parent feel if you gave a quick, simple answer?

## Appreciating Different Beliefs and Perspectives

Lyn, a mother, and Carol, a child care provider, are sitting together talking.

**Lyn:** "Arella is still not using her potty. If anything, things are getting worse."

**Carol:** "What do you think she should be doing at his point?"

**Lyn:** "She should be trained. She's 2 years old!"

**Carol:** "Hmmm . . . . "

**Lyn:** "Yeah . . . well, my mother and sister rag me about Arella every time I'm over there. It makes me crazy."

**Carol:** "I'll bet. Do you care about it as much as your mother and sister?"

**Lyn:** "Oh, not really — well, yes — I mean no. I mean, I think it should be soon, but it doesn't bother me as much as it does them. Anyway, how do you handle the potty thing here? Do you do more than just the getting-acquainted-with-the-potty stuff?"

**Carol:** "I think maybe we should start at the beginning. How about if you tell me what you're doing at home with her and I can tell you what we are doing here. Then we can talk about how we can work together. "

**Lyn:** "Maybe I'll just tell my mother and sister to cool it."

**Carol:** "Maybe you will, but it sounds like what they think means a lot to you."

**Lyn:** "Well, in my family they start with potty-sitting at 8 months. We didn't even have real diapers, just homemade stuff. I mean, you can see why it would help to get it over with."

**Carol:** "Yes, I can see that. Go ahead . . . ."

Think about a time when you were in a situation where your beliefs were different from those of a parent.

- What did you do? Say?
- How did the parent respond?
- What did you do or will you do next time to keep the dialogue going so that you can continue working together?
- What did you learn about yourself and your own beliefs through this interaction?

## People Don't Always "Hear" What You Intend to Communicate

People may hear the words we say but not necessarily understand what we intend to communicate. It is important in your daily work to be aware that these kinds of confusions can happen over small as well as big things. Sometimes you will be aware of them. Sometimes you won't. Just knowing they exist is the first step in being able to sort them out.

Look at all the different ways these parents respond to hearing the same words:

A caregiver is talking in front of a group of parents at a parent meeting. She says, "I'm glad I had a chance to make the center's health policy clear."

One father is thinking, "I'm glad they explained this so I can plan."

A mother is thinking, "What in the world do they expect me to do with my baby when she's sick?"

Another mother is thinking, "I'm so glad they won't be exposing Freddy to a bunch of germs."

Another father is thinking, "I guess I'd better not sneeze or they'll throw me out."

Parents respond even more powerfully when the topic is more emotionally charged:

A caregiver is talking in front of a group of parents at a parent meeting. She says, "I'm glad we've had a chance to talk about biting."

One father is thinking, "You'd think some kid had rabies."

A mother is thinking, "They don't even know that kids won't stop biting unless you show them how it feels."

Another father is thinking, "This all sounds very sensible."

The fourth, a mother, is thinking, "They are too soft on the kids here. I don't want my kid bitten again!"

Picture yourself as a parent at one of these meetings.
- What would your first response be?
- What kinds of things are happening in your life that might influence your interpretation?

Think about a recent situation in which you and your colleagues were informed about a new policy or other change in the workplace. List all of the different ways you can imagine that people might have responded.

Carmen, a home visitor, and Gemilla, a young mother, are sitting at the local playground watching 22-month-old Jemal playing with some other toddlers.

**Carmen:** "I see Jemal really tries to get what he wants."

**Gemilla:** "Yeah, yesterday he and another little boy were fighting over a toy. He pushed the boy down and his mother got really mad. I didn't know what to do."

**Carmen:** "Well, I guess you have to make it really clear to him what's okay with you and what's not okay."

**Gemilla:** "You mean I should punish him if he grabs and pushes?"

**Carmen:** "No, I really mean just talking to him and helping him stop, and showing him you don't like that kind of behavior. How do you think you would do that?"

Think of a time when someone misinterpreted something you did or said:
- Why do you think you were misunderstood?
- How did you respond?
- What did you do, or might you do, to clarify the misunderstanding?
- When you have a misunderstanding with someone, do you think it makes a difference if you know each other well? Why?

## Misunderstandings Can Be Opportunities to Learn & Grow Together

Misunderstandings are a natural part of communication. Though we certainly try to avoid them, what we do when they occur is even more important. Good things can come from these unavoidable mix-ups.

Joyce, mother of 3-year-old Arnie, has come to pick him up from child care and is approached by his child care provider, Bruce.

**Bruce,** annoyed: "I need to remind you once again to bring in a few changes of clothes for Arnie. When we go outside, he gets grubby. Then he's uncomfortable for the rest of the day."

**Joyce:** "Is that right? Well, I wish you wouldn't let him get so dirty. *I* certainly don't."

Joyce then drags Arnie out of the center. She is thinking to herself: "You'd think I have nothing to do all day but wash clothes."

At the same time, Bruce, looking downcast, thinks: "That didn't go very well. What did I say? I need to work this out better somehow."

The next day, Bruce approaches Joyce, who is clearly avoiding him.

**Bruce:** "I apologize for what happened yesterday. I could see you were angry. It had been a really hard day, and I wasn't thinking clearly."

**Joyce:** "I had one of those days myself, and I guess I really barked back at you. I'm sorry, too."

**Bruce:** "But you did bring up something important that we should talk about — that Arnie's getting dirty. We think that it's important that kids play outdoors. I'm not sure what we can work out, but I'd like to try."

**Joyce:** "Oh, I was just really grumpy. I get sick of doing laundry. But I think I'm just feeling nagged as much as anything. Of course he has to play outdoors."

**Bruce:** "I'm sorry it felt like I was bugging you. I guess I was! I could pay attention to how Arnie gets so dirty, and also try not to nag you."

**Joyce:** "Thanks for speaking to me. I wasn't going to bring it up myself."

**Bruce:** "Yeah, well, I think it's better to talk."

**Joyce:** "See you tomorrow. "

Think about the above interaction:
- Do you think this caregiver and parent feel they know each other better?
- Why is this better for Arnie?
- What do you think they might do the next time something similar happens?

Think of a time when you regretted something you said to a parent.
- What, if anything, did you do about it? Why?
- What was the outcome?

## Exercises for Learning & Growing Together

**Make a list of all the ways you can tell or show someone that you appreciate them.**
- What feels like the most natural and comfortable way for you to get this message across?
- How do you think telling someone that you appreciate them can affect your relationship?

**Observe an interaction between a colleague and parent.**
- What do you think your colleague may be feeling?
- What do you think the parent may be feeling?
- What do you see and/or hear that makes you imagine that these are their feelings?
- Later, ask you colleague what he/she felt and what he/she imagined the parent felt.

**Think about an interaction you had with a parent this week during which you tried to share something about his or her child.**
- What did you want to communicate to this parent?
- Do you think the parent understood what you were trying to get across? Why or why not?

*Misunderstandings are a natural part of communication. Though we certainly try to avoid them, what we do when they occur is even more important. Good things can come from these unavoidable mix-ups.*

**Then talk with the parent.**

- Ask what he/she thought and felt.
- Ask if there was anything else you might have said or done to make your message clearer.
- What did you learn from talking with this parent?
- How can checking in with parents about what they understand be useful?

**Take a relaxing walk-and-talk with a colleague. Share a story about a time when you and a parent had a misunderstanding.**

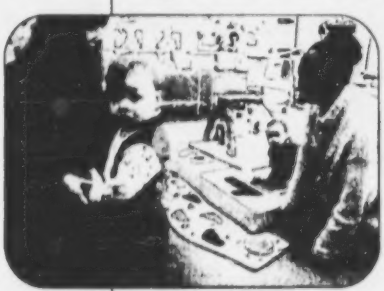
- Describe how you felt.
- Describe how you think the parent felt.
- Talk about what you did or might do next time in a similar situation to strengthen your partnership in supporting a child.

## Learning From the Video

Look at the fourth vignette on the *Seven Ways to Build Strong Relationships* video, "Acknowledge Parents' Feelings." In this vignette, you see Patti Deeke, a physical therapist, visiting 1-year-old Jaben and his parents, Tori and John Ellis.

- What do you think was the most important thing that happened during this home visit?
- What statements does Patti make and what questions does she ask that let the parents know she has heard them and that she is interested in hearing more?
- What do you see that gives you clues about the impact of these statements and questions on Tori and John?
- How do you think Patti feels and is affected by the deep feelings Tori and John express?
- What words, actions, and facial expressions of Patti's make you think this?
- What is it like for you when parents bring up difficult issues or feelings? How do you usually respond? How do you think that affects the family? How does it affect you?
- How did you react to Patti's asking the Ellis' how they were feeling about their concerns about Jaben's development?
- What do you think the appropriate role of an early intervention specialist is regarding encouraging parents to talk about their feelings?

Look at the third vignette in the *Seven Ways to Build Strong Relationships* video, "Take Time to Listen," where you see Omonike Olasbasi (called "Nikki") greeting Andrea and Jonathan Goodwin and their 15-month-old son, Christopher.



- What do you see each person do in this segment?
- What impact do you think Nikki's words and actions have on the mother? Father? Christopher?
- What does Nikki learn about Christopher and his family as a result of this morning greeting?
- What might you have done differently?

## Summing Up

There are many ways in which you have an impact on parents. They also have an impact on you. Recognizing and appreciating the importance of your role helps you be more aware of yourself as a message giver and receiver. Misunderstandings, if dealt with, can be valuable opportunities for increasing understanding between you and parents. This helps you forge a relationship with them that creates the necessary climate for collaboration, problem solving, and a better understanding of their children. This is an important contribution to children's well-being.

In Chapter 3, "Behavior Has Meaning," we go a little deeper into understanding the underlying meaning of our interactions.

*There are many ways in which you have an impact on parents. They also have an impact on you. Recognizing and appreciating the importance of your role helps you be more aware of yourself as a message giver and receiver.*

# Chapter 3:

# Behavior Has Meaning (you just don't always know right away what it means!)

*We all have a tendency to assume we know fairly well what's going on with people, adults and children alike, without really thinking about it very much. But to understand what another person is really feeling and thinking is a complex process, and requires taking time to step back and think. Indeed, the same behavior exhibited by different people may have different meanings, and different behaviors may express the very same feeling. For example, crying could indicate hunger or protest at not getting one's way. Shouting and turning away both may be expressions of anger. Trying to understand the meaning of behavior is important, because only after you figure out the meaning – as best you can – are you able to respond in a sensitive and effective way.*

In this chapter we focus on the importance of understanding the meaning of behavior. We will take a close look at:

- the key role of observation;
- the influence of early relationships and experiences; and
- the need to be aware of how our own reactions to others can influence our ability to understand their behavior and intentions.

You are probably very accustomed to puzzling about the meaning of children's behavior, because they are often the primary focus of your attention. Because children develop so rapidly and their ways of communicating change, you are watching carefully

to try to understand what they are experiencing and telling you. Families need and deserve the same consideration and thoughtfulness.

The following situation probably is quite familiar to you:

Everybody has some idea of what this baby's crying means.

*"He's hungry." "He's tired." "He hurt himself."*
*"There's nothing really wrong." "He lost his lovey."*
*"He misses his mother." "He's mad." "He just wants to get his way."*

Most of these interpretations are possible. How do you go about finding out which of these suggestions describes the way the baby really feels?

Think of a time when you and a colleague or parent had different ideas about what someone's behavior meant.

- What was the behavior?
- What were the different interpretations of it?
- What was each person's explanation for his/her interpretation?
- What was yours?
- Did discussion with others change your perspective? Why? Why not?

*The next time you find yourself in a situation where people have different views of behavior, be curious about why they think what they think.*

The next time you find yourself in a situation where people have different views of behavior, be curious about why they think what they think. As an experiment, ask them to share their reasons. Take time to consider their ideas and compare them to yours. Be open to considering other explanations as it will strengthen your work.

In order to find out which ideas are most accurate, you have to look to the person whose behavior you are trying to understand. This requires taking time to observe.

## Careful Observation Is Essential

You are observing all the time — at home, at work, and in all other situations in which you find yourself. Really careful observation of behavior, though, entails an ongoing process of thoughtful looking, listening, questioning, and looking again.

Whether you notice a small or a big change in someone's behavior, figuring out what it means is important. Such simple comments such as, "You're really quiet today. Are you okay? Is anything wrong?" or "You look particularly happy" may invite a person to share what he or she is feeling.

There is usually a goal associated with the observation (e.g., to figure out when Bobby is most likely to bite; to learn more about why Janey seems to prefer playing by herself). Careful observation takes time. You must watch from the outside in order to understand what a person is experiencing on the inside. Your goal as a practitioner working with children and families is to become a more purposeful and aware observer.

Here are some tips to help you become a more keen observer of children:

- Be sure to observe over a period of time, during different points during the day, and in different situations.
- Find a way to record what you observe so you can go back and think about it.
- Remember that you can observe while you are interacting with children as well as when they are engaged with other people or activities.
- Set aside your assumptions and attitudes. Describe what you see a child actually doing or saying before you move on to what you think the child is thinking or feeling.
- Observe together with parents. Talk about what each of you actually sees and what you think it might mean.

Think of a child whose behavior puzzles you, or a child you feel you don't know very well.

- Make a list of question(s) you might ask yourself about this child to better understand the meaning of his/her behavior.
- Choose one of your questions. Over the next few days, observe this child to try to begin to answer it.
- Are there any patterns in this child's behavior that begin to be evident?
- Share your observations with a colleague and with the child's parent.
- Does any of what you are seeing sound familiar to them?
- Ask how they understand the child's behavior.
- What have you learned about this child? What new questions, if any, have emerged?

*Careful observation takes time.*

*You must watch from the outside*

*in order to understand what*

*a person is experiencing*

*on the inside.*

## Being Aware of the Influence of Early Relationships and Experiences

Experiences in our first relationships influence, and are part of, all that follows. They live on in us in important ways. Simply appreciating this about yourself and others can help you see how the relationships you are building with children and families today are creating possibilities for who they will be, and how they will be with one another, tomorrow. This awareness is also important for helping you to understand what factors influence your own feelings and actions, as well as others' feelings and actions.

The people you were close to growing up — a parent, a grandmother, a great-uncle, a teacher, a neighbor — and your experiences with them, shape who you are today. Most of us still believe much of what these special people told us about ourselves, about other people, and about the world. They conveyed these messages in words and in actions. These messages reflected their own cultures, their beliefs, their values, and their own experiences. And they live on in us.

Yvonne is showing Lidia how to encourage her 7-month old, Nicky, to hold his head up for a longer period of time through games they can enjoy.

Here Lidia wanted some help or perhaps just some reassurance that she was positioning Nicky properly even though Yvonne can see she's doing well. Lidia's past experiences have led her to feel insecure, unsure of her ability to do things right. Yvonne responded by saying, "Let's move on." The experi-

ences in her past have warned her against being taken advantage of and have encouraged her to get on with it. She passes this on to Lidia.

In some ways, what Lidia and Yvonne feel today is influenced by some of the many messages from their pasts. These might be some of the voices they are "hearing":

**Lidia's mother:** "You got an A-? You need to work harder."
**Lidia's father:** "Sloppy Liddy — you always miss the details."
**Lidia's Aunt Maude:** "You should be more careful — more like Johnny."

**Yvonne's mother:** "You need to stick up for yourself — people take advantage."
**Yvonne's teacher:** "That's too much time fussing with the details — a waste."
**Yvonne's grandfather:** "Don't whine. Of course you can do it."

Think of some important messages about yourself that you heard growing up.
- Consider each message and how it has influenced your way of seeing and responding to things.

Think of an interaction you had this week with a parent.
- Whose voices from your past might have influenced you?
- What messages might they be conveying to you?

Like Lidia and Yvonne, we carry with us experiences and people from our past. In work with young children and families, the feelings experienced within our early, important relationships are particularly brought to life.

## Being Aware of Attitudes and Beliefs

All of the following situations are typical of the kinds of things that go on between parents and children. No two people are likely to have the same response to these scenes, because our reactions are related in some way to our own childhood experiences, cultural beliefs, and ideas about what it means to be a good parent. As a result, we may view the same interaction, yet have very different opinions or judgments about how the parents and children are behaving. It may be easy to imagine and identify with how some of these people are feeling, and harder with others.

A home visitor is in a living room with a mother and child. A glass of milk has been spilled on the floor. The mother is pulling on the little boy's arm and he is pulling away from her and crying. She has just finished swatting him on the bottom. She is saying, "You keep still now or I'll give you another swat you'll really remember." The child is crying, "No! No!" The home visitor looks anxious.

*The people you were close to growing up — a parent, a grandmother, a great-uncle, a teacher, a neighbor — and your experiences with them, shape who you are today. Most of us still believe much of what these special people told us about ourselves, about other people, and about the world.*

*In work with children and families, it is especially important to become aware of your own feelings, beliefs, and values, and to seek to understand the feelings, beliefs, and values of others.*

Two child care workers are standing together. One is holding a baby a few months old who is crying. She says, "I've been holding her for 40 minutes and nothing stops her." Her colleague says, "She's spoiled. Just put her down."

~

A little girl, 3, is clinging to her mother and won't look at her family child care provider who has squatted down next to her. The mother is saying, "If you stop crying and go with Janet, we'll go to the bakery on the way home." The child says, "Cookies?"

~

A little girl is sitting at a table with her mouth determinedly clamped shut. The early intervention specialist who works with her is holding a spoon of food in front of her. The mother has thrust herself between them and is saying to the child, "Take a bite now. Come on. Come on. We've come a long way. That's why we're here. You do what they say."

~

A toddler is clinging to her mother who is getting ready to leave the child care center. The toddler is saying, "Don't go! Don't go!" His mother says, "It's all right. I'm not going yet. It's all right."

~

An older woman is talking to an early intervention specialist. She is holding a 2-year-old. The woman is saying, "I'm her Grandma. Her dad's not around. And her mother's in jail." The early intervention specialist says, "Oh, I see. So you are taking care of her."

~

A mother is responding to her child who has spilled some milk on the floor. The mother is saying, "I know you didn't mean to. Don't feel so bad, sweetheart." The home visitor is watching the interaction with interest.

~

A mother, who is new to the United States, hands her 2-month-old son's child care provider a feeding and sleeping schedule she wants followed. She emphasizes that she wants him to fall asleep on his own, even if it means that he cries a lot.

~

All of these scenes evoke feelings, attitudes, and values that we hold but often without conscious awareness of them. These responses may lead us to approve or disapprove of the behavior of any of the children and parents in these scenes, which can then interfere with our ability to respond in the most sensitive and effective way. That is why in work with children and families, it is especially important to become aware of your own feelings, beliefs, and values, and to seek to understand the feelings, beliefs, and values of others.

Pick the scene that was most compelling for you.

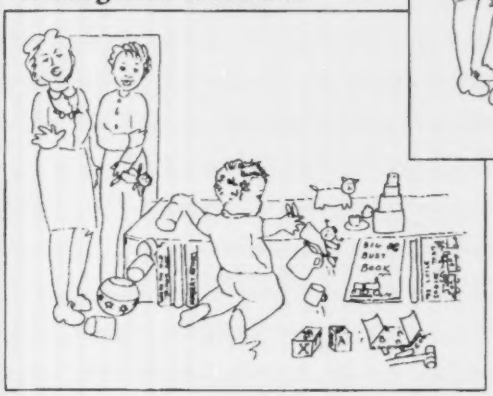
- What made it stand out?
- Why do you think this is the one that you chose?
- What do you think each person in the scene is feeling?
- Is it easy or hard for you to imagine what they are feeling? Why do you think this is so?
- Can you imagine other people having a different view of this interaction?
- How do you think your own beliefs, attitudes, and/or ideas about what it means to be a "good" parent influence your interpretation of these scenes?

## Your Reactions Are Important

Your reactions to people's behavior give you important information. They help you understand what they may be feeling and guide your response to them. If, for example, when talking to parents you feel overwhelmed by all the questions they are asking, this may mean that they are feeling overwhelmed, too. With this awareness, you might respond by helping them to feel more in control, perhaps by working with them to prioritize their concerns. But sometimes how you *feel* about someone's words or actions can interfere with your ability to understand the actual meaning of the other's behavior. It is helpful to pay attention to your own immediate reactions and to reserve judgment.

**"Being Curious"**

**"Getting Into Trouble!!!!"**



- What would your heading for this picture be?
- Why?
- How would your view of this child's behavior influence how you might respond?
- What are some things you might observe, know, or want to find out that can help you understand the meaning of his actions and what he is feeling?
- What is the message a child might receive if you approached him with the idea that he is curious?
- What is the message a child might receive if you approached him with the idea that he is "making trouble"? Does it matter? Why?

Freddy, the little boy in the picture above, has been restless all day. He has gone from one activity to another, never settling in, and he seems somewhat out of sorts. Here are stories of two caregivers in his center at the end of a long day:

**Sylvia** has spent much of her morning straightening up the classroom. She has already cleaned up the low toy shelves a number of times. She has occasionally noticed that Freddy is wandering about a lot but she has not actually interacted with him except in passing. She straightens up the toy shelves again, goes on a short bathroom break, and returns to see Freddy at the shelves.

- Why do you think Freddy's activity catches Sylvia's attention?
- How might Sylvia react to Freddy's activity?
- How might Sylvia describe what Freddy is doing and how Freddy is feeling?

**Karen** has tried to help Freddy get engaged in different activities several times during the day but he has just wandered from one thing to another. Now she notices that he has gone to the low toy shelves and is happily engaged in exploring what he can do with the different toys. She stops to watch.

- Why does Freddy's activity catch Karen's attention?
- How might Karen react to Freddy's activity?
- How might Karen describe what Freddy is doing and how Freddy is feeling?

Sylvia and Karen see Freddy's behavior from their own points of view, and these points of view are very different. As a result, Karen is more likely to see Freddy as engaged and enjoying his play, and to observe the way he likes to learn about and manipulate toys. Sylvia, on the other hand, is more likely to perceive that Freddy is simply making a mess. This difference in how Karen and Sylvia see him will determine how they will respond to him. Stepping back and thinking about our immediate reactions can help us figure out why we might be reacting the way we are. This allows us to look at the other's behavior more clearly, which in turn helps us respond more effectively.

## Parents Need to Be Noticed, Too

In order to build strong relationships with families, you need to pay close attention to parents as well as to their children. While adults are certainly more capable of describing their feelings than young children, we are also far more experienced at hiding them.

Just as you try to understand the meaning of a child's behavior, you also need to be attuned to what a parent's behavior may mean, and what it may reflect about their feelings regarding their child. Most of us, providers and parents alike, think we know the best way to raise a child. That's why when people do it differently than we do, we often don't think they're doing it "right."

Parents who care deeply about their children show it in markedly different ways. Being aware of that is important. If you make judgments too quickly, you are less likely to wonder about what you see. You may not ask important questions if you feel you already know the answers. Staying open-minded and thoughtful will help you better understand families, and help you build more useful and productive relationships.

Denise is brand new at her family support home visiting job. She has been to visit Candy, 21, and her 9-month-old daughter, Daria, twice. She knows that a pediatrician is worried because Daria is overweight and does not seem very active or energetic, though there is nothing medically wrong with her.

Candy held Daria throughout the entire two visits. At one point, Denise asked if Candy might want to put Daria down on the floor so she could stretch a bit. She also inquired about other ways in which Daria might get some exercise. Candy said that Daria liked it on her lap.

Last week, before Denise left, she told Candy all of the things that she had learned about how important moving around was — about rolling over, sitting, and crawling. Candy said her floor wasn't really clean. And when Denise suggested a blanket on the floor, Candy said she'd try it later.

A short time after Denise arrived for today's visit, Daria woke up. Candy propped a bottle for her, and after Daria finished it, Candy sat down and held Daria on her lap. Denise felt discouraged, angry, and stuck. She didn't think that Candy was really taking proper care of Daria. Daria just sat like a big lump on her mother's lap when she should be active and learning by doing.

Candy had a lot to talk about today — her boyfriends, her neighbors, her girlfriends, her mother. She became really animated about these things but she never wanted to talk about Daria. She hasn't followed any of Denise's suggestions, including taking Daria outside or not propping her bottle.

Denise cannot understand how someone can fail to see that she's not doing what's best for her baby. Denise feels Candy is being neglectful and wonders if she really loves Daria.

*You may not ask important questions if you feel you already know the answers. Staying open-minded and thoughtful will help you better understand families, and help you build more useful and productive relationships.*

Think about the above interaction:

- What might be some possible explanations for Candy's behavior that ***don't*** lead to the conclusion that she's an uncaring mother? Do you find that some of the possible explanations are related to environment, culture, health concerns, or personal experiences that Candy may have had?
- Think of some questions that Denise might have asked Candy in order to understand her behavior better.
- If Denise does not ask these questions, how might her relationship with this family be affected? How does that impact Denise? Candy? Daria?
- Why would it be helpful for Denise to discuss this with a colleague or a supervisor?

You probably see parents do things and hear them say things that elicit a strong reaction from you. The following exercise can help you think about your feelings and how to keep them from getting in the way of building positive relationships with the parents you work with.

Consider the following statements made by parents:

"Bobby, don't let him take that away from you. Grab it back."
"I always sneak away when it's time to go to work."
"If you pick him up, you'll just spoil him."
"I figured if she wouldn't put on her shoes, she could just come barefoot."
"I know these pants are torn, but he'll outgrow them anyway."
"If you want to wash him, go ahead. I didn't have time."
"He might be a bit hungry. I didn't have time to feed him."
"I know I'm supposed to do her exercises, but I just can't get to it."
"His cough sounds really bad, but it's just a little cold."
"If I don't mix his water with Kool-Aid, he won't drink it."
"Of course he sleeps in our bed. Where else would he sleep?"
"I only leave her alone long enough to run to the corner store."
"I can't stand it if she gets dirty."
"I never let him eat by himself. He makes such a mess."
"I know they're slippery, but she loves her party shoes."
"I can't do anything about it. They just bite each other when I'm not looking."
"It wasn't me that cut her hair. It was her older brother."

- Do some of these things especially bother you?
- Which ones are they?
- Why do you think they bother you so much?
- Would any of these affect your feelings about the parent and his/her parenting?
- How do you think your own beliefs, attitudes, and/or ideas about what it means to be a "good" parent influence your interpretation of these scenes?
- Show these statements to a colleague. Discuss both your reactions. How are they the same? How are they different? Why?

## Exercises for Learning & Growing:

**Take a relaxing "walk-and-talk" with a colleague. Share stories of situations in which a parent's behavior triggered some strong feelings in you.**

- Discuss the things you might do to help you clarify your own feelings, and those of a child or parent.
- How might these help make your response as useful as possible?

**Make a list of things parents and colleagues say and do over the next week that really bug you.**

- Take a good look at your list. Do you see any similarities or patterns in those things?
- What might you do to move beyond your initial response and become curious about whether these behaviors really mean what you think?

**Consider the following questions to help you think about what may have shaped your own attitudes and beliefs:**

***About Your Family Life:***
How did your family show love and affection?
How did your family handle disagreements and anger?
How did your family discipline children?
Did your family have an idea about what a good parent was?
What do you think are the three most important ideas that you got from your family about yourself? About others?

***What Are You Like?***
Talkative or quiet?
Patient or easily frustrated?
Flexible or stubborn?
Laid back or intense?
Enjoy groups or prefer one-to-one interaction?
Do you like helping people?
Do you feel you need to know all the answers?
Can you say "I don't know?"
When you feel you need help, can you usually ask for it?

## Learning From the Video

Look once again at the first vignette in the *Seven Ways to Build Strong Relationships* video, "Use What You Know," in which Elizabeth has a hard time separating from her mother.

- What do you see Elizabeth *doing* in this vignette?
- What do her actions tell you about how she is feeling?
- Could there be any other explanations for her behavior?
- Based on what you see Elizabeth doing, how would you respond?

Look at the sixth vignette in the *Seven Ways to Build Strong Relationships* video — "Understand the Parents' View of their Child." You see Zulma Santos, a Healthy Families America support worker, making a home visit to Cecilia Galvan and her 7-month-old son, Erik.

- What do you see Erik do in this vignette?
- What does this tell you about how he might be feeling?
- How would you describe his personality?
- How is his mother, Cecilia, responding to his cues?
- What questions would you want to ask Cecilia to understand how she sees her son — his personality, likes, and dislikes?
- How might Cecilia's culture, values, and beliefs be influencing her behavior, her expectations for Erik, and the way she interacts with Erik? What questions would you ask to find out more about this?
- How would you respond to Erik's cues?
- How would you discuss what you see with Cecilia?

Look at the seventh and final vignette in the *Seven Ways to Build Strong Relationships* video, "Ask for Help." You see Early Head Start home visitor Lekeyta Bittle, who is concerned because Gwen Pratt Demous, a mother she has been working with for several months, has missed several scheduled visits.

- Why does Lekeyta think Gwen is missing visits?
- How do you think the missed visits are making Lekeyta feel about Gwen? About herself?
- Why is Lekeyta thinking of ending her home visits to Gwen?
- What happens when Lekeyta seeks help from her supervisor, Patricia?
- How does Lekeyta's taking the time to reflect on her own reaction, as well as on the possible meaning of Gwen's behavior, help Lekeyta? Gwen? Pebbles?

## Summing Up

*It is worthwhile to reflect on your initial reaction to a behavior. Giving yourself time to think and observe will strengthen the work that you do with families.*

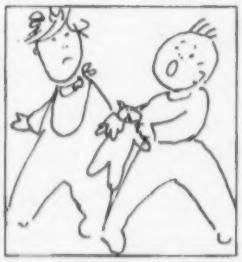
Your feelings and assumptions about the behavior of others can often help you in your work. They can also get in the way. It is worthwhile to reflect on your initial reaction to a behavior. Giving yourself time to think and observe will strengthen the work that you do with families.

In Chapter 4 we put it all together by using this knowledge and understanding in your everyday interactions with families to join with them in support of their children.

# Chapter 4:
# Learning & Growing Together With Families

*To be involved with very young children and families is to re-enter that early world of powerful feelings, where the loss of a blanket is a heartbreaking experience, the first face you see in the morning is like the sun coming up, and the disapproval of an adult is scary, enraging, or both.*

Anyone who works with infants, toddlers, and parents exists in a matrix of powerful, passionate feelings. Everyone has them. You have them. The infants and toddlers have them. The parents have them. Sometimes it can be hard to tell who is feeling what and why.



*"It's mine. Let go!"*
*"It's mine. Stop!"*

*"I never said that!"*
*"You did, too!"*

*Parent: "You didn't tell me to bring it..."*
*Staff: "I asked you three times."*

Moments like these are bound to happen. None of us can escape feeling and acting like this sometimes. Still, it is well worth trying to be aware of your feelings as much as possible, because it enables you to make stronger relationships with families, and to become one of the positive voices that children and parents experience — a voice they can usefully carry forward. Helping shape their futures, in however modest a way, is a privilege and an opportunity.

*It is well worth trying to be aware of your feelings . . . because it enables you to make stronger relationships with families.*

11

## Your Interactions With Families Shape Their Ideas About Themselves

There are many ways in which you can have a positive effect on children and parents, and the relationships they build with one another.

The interactions children have with family members, you, and other constant, important people in their lives give them their early ideas of who they are and what they can do. Over time, these early ideas will continue to be added to and reorganized. Some may be highlighted, others stored away on a back shelf, but they will always be part of who a child is.

You are a contributor to each child's sense of self. The things you say and do day after day carry messages children take inside which then become a part of each experience that follows. Children believe what you tell them. That is why it is so important to think about what you are saying to them and how they are hearing it.

*The interactions children have with family members, you, and other constant, important people in their lives give them their early ideas of who they are and what they can do.*

Three-year-old Bobby has been concentrating very hard on creating a block structure. It is clear that Bobby has something in his mind that he's trying to achieve. He has been moving blocks very carefully and balancing them just so. Nikki, a caregiver, notices his efforts and stops behind him to watch.

Suddenly, part of it sways and falls. Bobby lifts an arm and starts to sweep it all down, hesitates, and then Nikki says, "That's such a nice thing you've built. You nearly had it. Why don't you try again?"

Bobby turns, lowers his arms, smiles at Nikki, and says, "It's a special loader, really tall."

Nikki says, "I see it is."

Bobby relaxes and begins to rebuild what has fallen.

Think about the above interaction:
- What was the message Nikki sent?
- How did what Nikki said influence Bobby?
- Try to imagine how receiving this kind of message day in and day out would affect Bobby.
- What if no one had noticed, or someone had said, "You need to be more careful," or "Clean up the mess," or "You built it too high. Make it shorter," or "Don't knock that down!" Take the time to write down how you think Bobby would feel in response to each of these examples.

Over the next few days, pay attention to an everyday interaction between an adult and a child.
- How did the adult respond?
- What was the message the adult gave?
- How did the child respond?
- How do you think similar messages given over time would contribute to how a child feels about him or herself?

You also shape the way a parent thinks of himself or herself. The things that you say and do can contribute to a parent's sense of self as a parent and as a person. You may provide a parent with a momentary sense of well-being, or have some impact on how a parent interacts with a child. It is very useful to pay attention to how you may influence someone else through the content and tone of your interactions.

Sherry, the mother of 2½-year-old Brian, has come to pick him up at his child care center. She is being greeted by Lakeisha, Brian's caregiver.

**Lakeisha:** "Hi, Sherry. We're still having a lot of trouble getting Brian to sit still during circle time. He just can't do it. And it's really disturbing to the other kids."

Sherry, looking totally exasperated, goes over to Brian who is intensely involved in a very lively, energetic action-figure game with two other children. Sherry abruptly grabs him by the arm. Brian, startled, looks up at her, his eyes wide with fear.

**Sherry:** "That's it, young man. We're going!"

**Brian,** now beginning to cry: "No Momma, no Momma!"

Imagine this instead:

**Lakeisha:** "Hi, Sherry. Brian's playing with his buddies. They've invented a wonderful, imaginative game and they're really involved with it. They're getting rid of some energy and having a great time together."

**Sherry,** looking delighted: "That's great. Heaven knows, energy is something Brian sure isn't lacking."

**Lakeisha:** "He and most of the kids. They all seem to be nonstop."

**Sherry:** "Really? Sometimes I think it's just him and that we're doing something wrong. We can't get him to sit down at home — even at mealtimes. Forget taking him out to eat. It's a nightmare."

**Lakeisha:** "That must be really frustrating. We see that sometimes, too. It's hard for Brian to sit during circle time. Maybe we could put our heads together about how we can help him slow down sometimes. We can compare notes."

**Sherry:** "I'd really like that. If I come a few minutes early on Friday, could you take some time to talk then?"

**Lakeisha:** "I will see if I can arrange coverage for 20 minutes or so at 5:30. That should work since we have fewer kids then."

Sherry then goes to Brian, says "Hi," gives him a hug, and patiently helps him end his play.

Think about both scenes:

- How do you think each interaction made Sherry feel? Why?
- How did each of these interactions impact how Sherry felt about and responded to Brian?
- How might each interaction affect the relationship between Lakeisha and Sherry?

## Paying Attention to Both Parent and Child

Sometimes, a parent and a child need you or seek your attention at the same time. By figuring out a way to respond to both of them, you recognize and honor the importance of them both. When you do this regularly, you are sending a message over time that their relationship is not a competitive one, and that they both matter. This can serve as a positive experience for parents who tend to ignore their own needs, and for parents who have a hard time focusing on their child's needs.

A 13-month-old crawler Juan, is making noises as he reaches under the couch where the mother is sitting. A home visitor is seated on a chair across from his mother. The mother is saying, "It is not what I wanted. Not at all!" The home visitor says, "I understand that; and you seem so sad as well as angry. . . . Oops! Does Juan need something?" The mother says, "Juan, what are you up to?"

The mother moves to sit on the floor with Juan. The home visitor is leaning forward watching. The mother pulls something out from under the couch and hands it to Juan who is sitting and smiling. "Oh, I see. It's your yellow car. It was stuck again." The home visitor says, "A rescued car. A rescued Juan. Momma got your car."

The mother sits back on the couch while Juan plays with the car. The mother says, "There, he's happy." The home visitor says, "Yes, he is. There must be stuck cars all day long." The mother says, "You can say that again. It's a never-ending job." The home visitor says, "And you really work at it — now, you were saying that what happened wasn't at all what you wanted, right?"

Think about this interaction:

- Do you think both the mother and Juan felt taken care of?
- What might have happened to Juan if the home visitor hadn't called attention to him?
- What would the message have been to the mother if the home visitor hadn't paid attention to Juan?
- How do you think the mother felt when the home visitor continued their conversation using the mother's words?
- Are there times when you feel like you have to pay attention to two people at the same time? How do you manage it?

## Appreciating a Child Supports Both Children and Parents

Sometimes changing the focus from a child's problem to an appreciation of who the child is can be an important way you support parents.

As a mother and child care provider stand together talking, they notice that the mother's little boy is helping another child pull off a stubborn boot.

**Provider:** "Carlos is such a helpful little guy. He always notices when one of the kids needs help. It's really sweet. Somebody must be mighty nice to him."

**Mother:** "Really? He's my littlest. I thought maybe he was a little spoiled, what with the older ones fussing over him."

**Provider:** "It looks like they have been teaching him to be nice. I guess they learned it from you and are passing it along."

**Mother:** "Oh, I don't know . . . maybe, . . . I'm glad. He is a sweet little guy."

- How do you suppose a busy mother like this, who often feels she's not quite making it, would feel about this comment?
- How might it make her feel about herself and Carlos in the moment?
- How might it influence what happens on their trip home from child care? Why does it matter?

*Sometimes changing the focus from a child's problem to an appreciation of who the child is can be an important way you support parents.*

A mother is having a conversation with her daughter's early intervention specialist.

**Mother:** "How do you think she's doing? We've been working really, really hard."

**Early intervention specialist:** "She's doing wonderfully, but what really knocks me out is her sense of humor. She can be so funny; she's quite a character. You must have a lot of fun together."

- How might the early intervention specialist's comment influence how this mother feels about her child's session today? About their "work time" at home tomorrow?
- How might similar comments over time influence their relationship?

A home visitor is holding a baby who is 4 months old. Mother is coming back into the room.

**Home visitor:** "He just went into neutral while you were gone: watched you leave and hardly breathed until you got back. I think he'd like to say hello."

**Mother:** "Really? Did he really watch for me? Come here, Ralphie. I'll give you a hug."

- How do you think messages like this over time could affect how this mother

thinks about herself and Ralphie?
- How might these messages influence their relationship?
- Have you ever done anything similar? Why? What did you hope might happen as a result?

A mother is sitting in a pediatrician's examination room waiting with 18-month-old Alexa. The child development specialist comes in and asks her if she has any questions about her child's behavior and development. Alexa is squirming around on her mother's lap, trying to get down.

**Mother:** "I'm really having a hard time keeping her from getting into everything as usual."

**Child development specialist:** "I'd really wonder if she didn't want to get down and get moving at this age. That's how children learn. It's those really eager, curious ones that keep us running. But it isn't easy, is it? How are you managing?"

- How do you think this mother experienced Alexa's behavior before this interaction with the child development specialist?
- How do you think she was feeling about herself?
- How might the specialist's response change this?

## Exercises for Learning & Growing

**Take a relaxing "walk-and-talk" with a colleague. Exchange stories about a time when you felt most supportive and effective with a parent.**
- Describe what happened.
- What made you feel you were being supportive and effective?
- Are there times when you think your view of a child has made an impression on a parent? What made you think that this was so?

**Talk with a parent you feel comfortable with. This may be a parent in your program or someone from your personal life. Explain that you are learning about supporting parents and their relationships with their children.**
- Ask the parent to share a story of a time when he/she felt supported.
- Ask the parent for any advice he/she can share with you about your work with other parents.

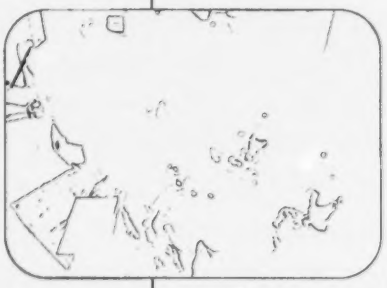
**Write down five messages you would like to give families.**
- Brainstorm with a colleague(s) different things you might do or say to communicate these messages.
- Post the list of messages in a prominent place so that you are reminded of them.

## Learning From the Video

Look at the fifth vignette in the *Seven Ways to Build Strong Relationships* video, "Refocus Issues on the Child," in which Lekeyta Bittle, an Early Head Start provider, is making a home visit to Gwen Pratt and her daughter, Alexis, whom she calls "Pebbles."

- How do you think this visit feels to Lekeyta?
- In what way do you see Gwen and Pebbles "asking" for Lekeyta's attention?
- How does Lekeyta pay attention to both Gwen and Pebbles' needs?
- How might the way Lekeyta handled this visit affect Gwen? Pebbles?

Look at the fourth vignette in the *Seven Ways to Build Strong Relationships* video, "Point Out the Positive." You see Marlana Thomas, a family support worker from Healthy Families America, making a home visit to Monique Fenton, her two children, ages 2 and 3, and a niece for whom Monique cares during the day.



- What does Marlana *do* during this visit that has a positive impact on Monique?
- Marlana asks Monique during the visit, "How did you get to the point where it was okay for them to explore in a messy sort of way, and you be so calm about it?" What do you think the impact of this question is on Monique? How do you think it made her feel?
- How do you think Marlana's knowledge of and experience with Monique shape how she interacts with her? What did Marlana do or say that tells you this?

## Summing Up

Now, at the end, it is time to think back to the beginning. There, you met May, Billy, and their new baby, Joey. Billy's and May's love and dedication to each other and to their son held great promise for them all. Their home visitor, Tammy, was just beginning a relationship with them that could sustain and enhance their dedication. May and Billy, like all parents, cannot know at the beginning just what script life will write for them and their child. Various people, like Tammy, could enter their lives, such as a speech therapist or a child care provider. There are many such people who could be in a position to make a positive contribution to their well-being. It doesn't matter how well parents are doing or how troubled they are: You can make a difference.

Being considerate, interested, curious, and respectful of parents is the most important thing you can do — for the relationship with the parent, for the child, for today, and for tomorrow. Thinking about and being aware of what you do and say makes it possible to appreciate that your relationships with children and parents hold that wonderful potential of contributing positively to their lives. This is also what makes your work with families truly meaningful and rewarding.

*Being considerate, interested, curious, and respectful of parents is the most important thing you can do — for the relationship with the parent, for the child, for today, and for tomorrow.*

# *Additional Resources from ZERO TO THREE:*

***Learning & Growing Together With Families Video Package (2001)***

*Seven Ways to Build Strong Relationships*, a 22-minute video, features real-life practitioners working with families in ways that promote the development of effective partnerships. The video and accompanying video guide lead viewers in improving observation skills and in reflecting on how the concepts presented in the video relate to their work. Includes a copy of the companion book, *Partnering With Parents to Support Young Children's Development*. (ISBN 0-943657-50-4)

$69.00 (#V500-zbk)

***Learning & Growing Together: Understanding and Supporting Your Child's Development***

by Claire Lerner and Amy Laura Dombro (2000)

ZERO TO THREE's first parenting book empowers parents and caregivers to be their own best resource by helping them *think in new ways*. Complex child development concepts are presented in accessible language and through vignettes, reflective questions, and discussion points. The pleasant format works equally well with fathers as mothers and is an excellent resource for group settings. (ISBN 0-943657-05-9; 52 pp.)

$12.00 (#235-zbk)

Also available in Spanish:
***Aprender y Crecer Juntos: Cómo Comprender y Fomentar el Desarrollo de Sus Hijos***
(2001; ISBN 0-943657-54-7; 52 pp.)

$12.00 (#264-zbk)

***Learning & Growing Together Tip Sheets: Ideas for Professionals in Programs that Serve Young Children and their Families***

by Stefanie Powers and Claire Lerner (2000)

The *Tip Sheets* give child care professionals ideas for putting *Learning & Growing Together* concepts into practice to improve their program's and staff's ability to support families. Each Tip Sheet was designed to assist staff working in diverse settings and roles including center-based settings, home visits, parent groups, and staff development. (ISBN 0-9436567-09-1; 8 pp.)

$6.00 (#241-zbk)

***How You Are Is As Important As What You Do...in making a positive difference for infants, toddlers and their families***

by Jeree H. Pawl and Marie St. John (1998)

This popular book illustrates the message that *how* parents and professionals interact with babies and young children, and with each other, contributes as much to the quality of the relationships involved and the developmental outcome as *what* is done in the interaction. Useful for training and ongoing professional development, the book features a series of vignettes, dialogues and brief scenarios. (ISBN 0-943657-39-3; 44 pages)

$12.00 (#175-zbk)

***The Power of Questions: Building Quality Relationships With Infants and Families***

Rebecca Parlakian (2001)

From the Zero to Three Center for Program Excellence, this piece explores how leaders and staff alike can use reflective approaches to establish quality relationships with families. It focuses on the complex decisions practitioners face everyday in their work with parents and children and presents strategies for boundary-setting and managing one's reactions. (ISBN 0-943657-49-0; 11 pp.)

$10.00 (#258-zbk)

**Additional copies of this book, the resources listed above, and other materials for practitioners, educators, parents, and others who care for and about young children are available from:**

ZERO TO THREE®
2000 M Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036
(800) 899-4301
**www.zerotothree.org**

Learning & Growing Together *with families:*

# Partnering With Parents to Support Young Children's Development

*a resource for:*
*home visitors • Early Head Start program staff • early intervention specialists • child care providers • others who work with the families of young children*

You know that the relationships you build with children and families make an important difference in their lives, and in yours, too. We invite you to explore these everyday interactions — to take a personal look at your work and the powerful impact you have on children and families. Using *Partnering With Parents to Support Young Children's Development* will help you better understand yourself. The real-life vignettes and simple but powerful exercises are designed to increase your awareness of the influences that have shaped your own beliefs and what you bring to your relationships.

Working in this way can make your work both less stressful and more rewarding.

*"A much needed resource tool for staff whose jobs involve supporting the lifelong parent-child relationship . . . and the basis for a solid inservice training program for staff."*

*—Ann Byrne,*
*Chief Program Officer, Crossway Community*

*"Will greatly enhance your relationships with the children you care for and their parents. It explores the power of understanding the meaning of your behavior as well as others."*

*—Kathryn Barnard, R.N., Ph.D.*
*Center on Human Development and Disabilities, University of Washington*

Learning & Growing Together *with families:*

**Video Package**
*featuring the video*

# Seven Ways to Build Strong Relationships

This 22-minute video shows real-life practitioners working with families in ways that promote the development of effective partnerships. Its accompanying video guide will lead you in improving your observation skills and in reflecting on how the concepts presented in the video relate to your own work.

By using the *Learning & Growing Together With Families Video Package* alone or with colleagues, you can build upon the core concepts and skills that undergird the Learning & Growing Together approach:

- self-awareness
- sensitive observation and careful reading of cures; and
- flexible response.

*"Early Head Start programs like ours will love this great training video. It provides practical, real-life scenarios to train staff in the nuts and bolts of relationship-based interventions. It will help our programs as we all strive for excellence!"*

*—Mimi Graham, Ph.D.*
*Director, Center for Prevention and Early Intervention*
*Florida State University*

*"Learning and Growing Together With Families shows us how powerful relationships can be. . . . An invaluable tool to explore the many aspects of establishing, building, and maintaining relationships between educators, parents, and children. . . . A wonderful resource for both work and outside "real life" situations."*

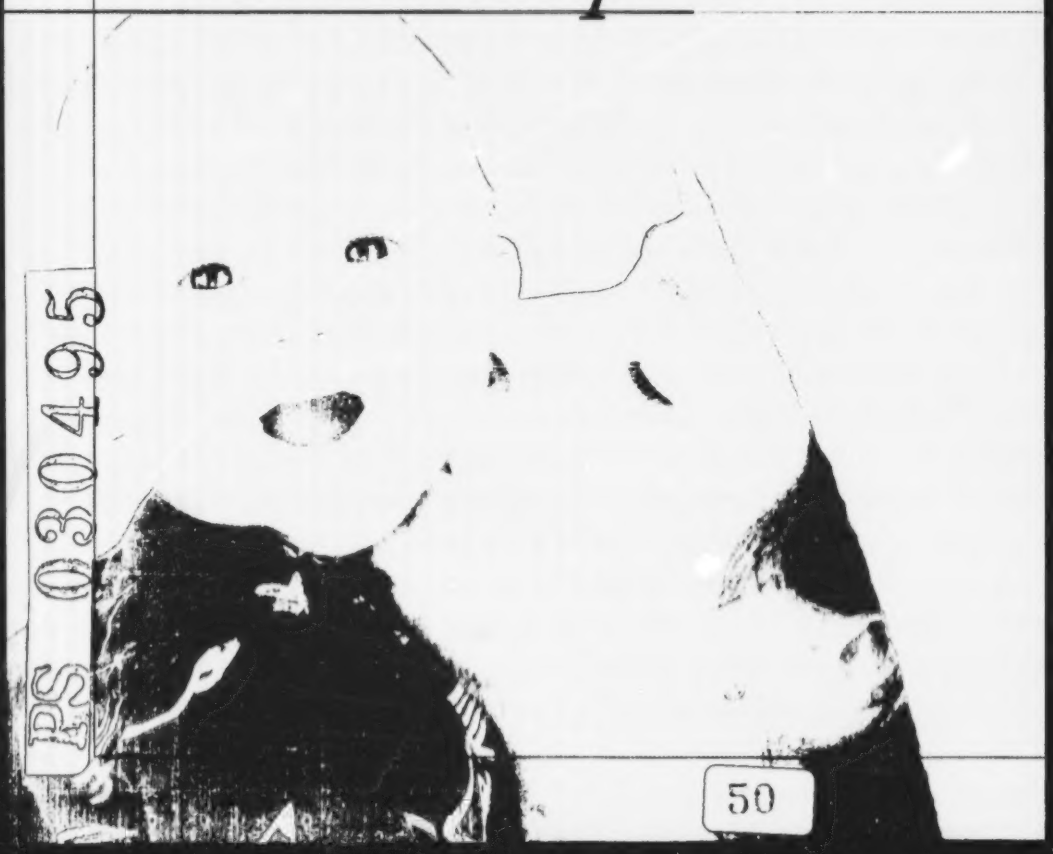
*—Shelley Remer*
*Director, Adas Israel Child Care Center*

ISBN 0-943657-51-2

# Learning & Growing Together *with families:*

VIDEO GUIDE

# *Seven Ways to Build Strong Relationships*



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ZERO TO THREE

This Video Guide is part of the *Learning & Growing Together With Families Video Package*, a training package designed to help practitioners strengthen relationships with parents. The goal of this package is to help people who work with young children appreciate the impact that their strong relationships with parents have on children's healthy development. Other components of the Video Package are:

- a 22-minute video, *Learning & Growing Together: Seven Ways to Build Strong Relationships*;
- a companion book by Jeree H. Pawl and Amy Laura Dombro, *Learning & Growing Together: Partnering With Parents to Support Young Children's Development;* and
- an overview of the package that describes some ways to use the book and the video together for professional development.

The Video Package components are designed to work together to help develop and strengthen the skills that build parent-practitioner relationships. A central concept of the package is the importance of practitioners' self-awareness and reflection (taking the time to think about what they bring to their work) which helps staff feel and be more effective.

The package is designed for practitioners working with families of children from birth to age 3, including direct service staff and their supervisors. Such practitioners may be family services workers in Early Head Start, early intervention specialists, home visitors, caregivers in a child care center or home, or providers of other specialized services to families. The materials can be used for large or small group training and in one-to-one training and supervision. They also can be used individually by interested staff members.

### Video Overview

The video is 22 minutes long and features seven vignettes, each of which illustrates a specific way of building and strengthening relationships with families that in turn can help promote children's healthy development. The vignettes focus on the following themes:

1. Use what you know.
2. Point out the positive.
3. Take time to listen.
4. Acknowledge parents' feelings.
5. Refocus issues on the child.
6. Understand the parents' view of their child.
7. Ask for help.

The vignettes were taped in Phoenix, Tallahassee, and metropolitan Washington, D.C. They are all documentary in nature; that is, they are actual interactions that

were captured on video. The participants are who they say they are; they are not actors. The situations in which you see them are typical of those happening thousands of times each day among practitioners, families, and children.

This Video Guide contains both a general framework for discussion that applies to all the vignettes, as well as additional questions related to the specific content of each vignette. The section organized on a vignette-by-vignette basis contains two types of questions: *exploration* and *application*. Exploration questions encourage participants to think about what they see take place in the vignette; application questions will help participants reflect on what the vignette means for their own work.

After trainees have participated in a group discussion, you might encourage them to spend some time continuing their reflections (on their own or with a colleague) as an opportunity to further consider their own experiences and what they have learned from the video that they can apply to their work. The questions can also be used as a written exercise.

fruitful discussion. You can also add questions that are pertinent to your group members and the particular focus of their work. The video and follow-up discussion can be used with direct service staff and supervisors together, or with either group alone.

If time allows, it is preferable to show the video in its entirety and then go back and discuss one segment at a time. Since each segment is only about 3 minutes long, each could be shown several times to give participants a chance to focus on everything that may be happening in the interaction. Posing a question, holding a discussion, and then reviewing the segment might offer new learning opportunities. A workshop session of 90 minutes will provide ample time to complete this process.

## A General Framework for Discussion

If you are facilitating a discussion, it is best to view the video in its entirety before showing it to a group. Previewing will provide both an overview of the video's messages and an opportunity to think about which of the vignettes will be most useful to the people in your group. From the questions offered in this guide, you can choose those that you feel will lead to an especially

Another strategy would be to use time periods of 15 to 30 minutes per week for several weeks to work with one or two vignettes at a time until all have been viewed and discussed. Also consider watching segments with the audio turned off to encourage staff to focus on the nonverbal communication that takes place among the people in each scene.

## Questions that apply to all vignettes:

**Observation.** To help participants build their observation skills and look carefully at everything that transpires in the vignette, encourage participants to be as specific as possible about what they actually see, rather than what they may believe is going on.

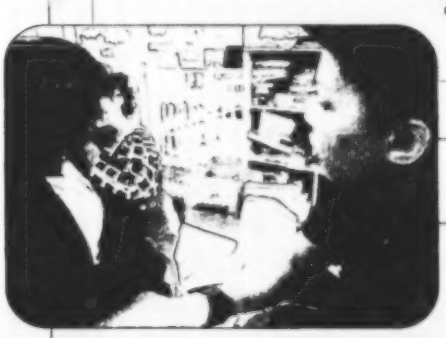
- What did you actually see happen in the vignette?
- Who is in the vignette, what is the setting, what did the participants do and say?

**Interpretation.** To help participants begin to ascribe meaning to what they saw, to ask thoughtful questions about the interactions they observed, and to build hypotheses about the past and future of the relationships portrayed, ask the following questions:

- How do you think the participants in the vignette feel? Why?
- What did they each do or say that gives you clues about what they are feeling?
- Why do you think each person behaved as they did?

**Application.** To help participants begin to reflect on how the vignette relates to their own work, ask the following questions:

- What was your reaction to what you just saw?
- Have you ever been in a similar situation? How did you handle it?
- What might you have done differently?
- What might you do differently in the future as a result of viewing and talking about this vignette?



## Vignette 1: Use what you know. (2:23 minutes)

*In this vignette, Erika, a child care provider, helps ease the morning separation for 2-year-old Elizabeth and her mother, Judith.*

***Featured Participants:***

**» Erika Weaver, Senior Staff, American College of Physics Child Care Center, College Park, MD**
**» Claire Lerner, Director, Learning & Growing Together Strategic Initiative, ZERO TO THREE**
**» Judith Cabrera Mulvey and her 28-month-old daughter, Elizabeth**

EXPLORATION

- What are some things Erika seems to know about this family that she puts to use in this situation? How do you think Erika came to know so much about them?
- How does Erika use her knowledge of Elizabeth and Judith in this situation? What are some of the things she actually does? How does this help Erika? Judith? Elizabeth?
- What did it take for Erica *not* to jump in and take Elizabeth from her mother? Why was it important to wait?
- What are some other things Erika might have done to ease the transition for this family?

APPLICATION

- What was your reaction to what you just saw?
- How might you have handled this situation?
- How do you get to know the children and families with whom you work? What is the process like when things go well? What is it like when it does not work as well?
- Think of a time when you used what you know about a family to help them with a challenging situation. How did your actions make you feel about yourself and your work?

## 2 Vignette 2: Point out the positive. (2:17 minutes)

*In this vignette, Marlana, a family support worker, brings a painting activity to a home visit.*

***Featured Participants:***

**» Marlana Thomas, Family Support Worker, Healthy Families Alexandria, a program of the Northern Virginia Family Service, Alexandria, VA**

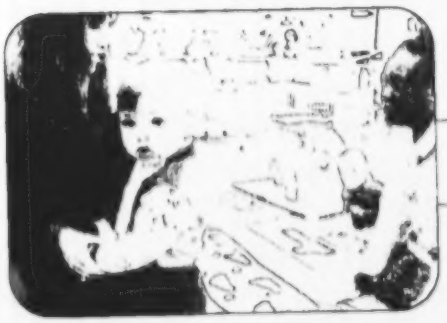
**» Monique Fenton and her 3-year-old son, T. J., her 2-year-old daughter, Davon, and her 4-year-old niece, Marrissa**

EXPLORATION

- How does Marlana help Monique recognize her positive approach to this activity with the children? How does Marlana's behavior encourage Monique to support her children's creative play?
- Marlana asks Monique how she became comfortable letting the kids freely explore, even making a mess? What does this question say to Monique? How do you think it will affect her parenting?
- What do you observe about the relationship between Monique and Marlana?

APPLICATION

- What was your reaction to what you just saw?
- What, might, would you have done differently in this situation?
- Compare your reactions to the following: "How did you get to the point where you could be so calm?" vs. "I like the way you are so calm." How do you like to be recognized? Note: Trainers may wish to explore viewers' reactions to Monique's appearance.



## 3 Vignette 3: Take time to listen. (2:23 minutes)

*At a child care center, Nikki, a provider, takes the time to connect with parents Andrea and Jonathan when they drop off their child, Christopher, in the morning.*

***Featured Participants:***

**» Omonike Olasbasi (called "Nikki"), Senior Staff, American College of Physics Child Care Center, College Park, MD**

**» Andrea and Jonathan Goodwin and their 15-month-old son, Christopher**

EXPLORATION

- How does Nikki greet this family? How does Andrea react? What role does Christopher play in this interaction?
- What are some things that Nikki says that let Andrea know she has a genuine interest in Christopher?
- What does Nikki learn as a result of her greeting?
- What impact do you think this interaction has on Andrea? Christopher? Nikki?

APPLICATION

- What was your reaction to what you just saw?
- How do you greet families in the morning? What kinds of greetings yield the most positive results for you? What kinds of morning interactions leave you most stressed?
- How do you encourage parents to give you information about their children that you need to do your job well?
- What would you have done differently in this situation?

## Vignette 4: Acknowledge parents' feelings (3:21 minutes)

*Patti, a physical therapist, makes a home visit to Tory and John, parents of Jaben, who has serious developmental and physical challenges. Patti finds herself in an emotional discussion that is outside of her expertise.*

***Featured Participants:***

**» Tori and John Ellis and their one-year-old son, Jaben**
**» Patti Deeke, physical therapist**
**» Trudi Norman-Murch, Southwest Human Development, Phoenix, AZ**

EXPLORATION

- Do you think it was appropriate for Patti to invite the Ellises to discuss theeir feelings in greater depth?
- How do you think this family got to the place where they could share intimate feelings with Patti?

APPLICATION

- What was your reaction to what you just saw?
- What might you have done differently if you were Patti?
- Think of a time when a family brought up issues that were beyond your expertise. How did you feel? What did you do? What could you do differently?
- What is it like for you when parents bring up difficult feelings? How do you handle it?
- How did you feel about Patti asking the parents how they feel about Jaben's development?
- How do you establish the boundaries of your role without cutting off communication?

## Vignette 5: Refocus issues on the child. (3:17 minutes)

*In this vignette, Lekeyta, a home visitor, helps a mother, Gwen, understand the effect her own feelings and actions have on her daughter, Alexis, whom she calls "Pebbles."*

***Featured Participants:***

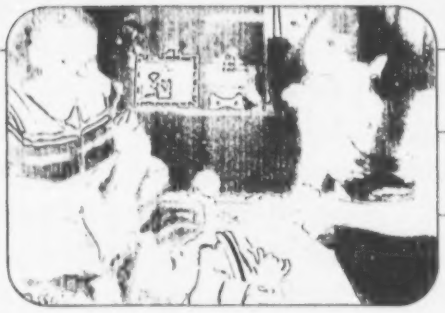
**» Lekeyta Bittle, Early Head Start Home Visitor, Dick Houser Center for Early Childhood Services, Tallahassee, FL**
**» Gwen Pratt Demous and her 8-month-old daughter, Alexis, who is called Pebbles**
**» Patricia Armstrong, Home-Based Program Specialist, Florida State University Early Head Start, Tallahassee, FL (Lekeyta's supervisor)**

EXPLORATION

- How does Lekeyta pay attention to both Gwen's and Pebbles' needs?
- What impact do you think Lekeyta's discussion of how stress affects Pebbles will have on Gwen? Pebbles?
- If you were Lekeyta, how would you follow up this conversation on your next visit?
- How does Patricia help Lekeyta?

APPLICATION

- What was your reaction to what you just saw?
- How might you have handled this situation?
- Do you find some families easier to connect with than others? Think about a family you connect with well and another where you have found it harder to build a relationship. What do you think accounts for the differences?
- How do you manage dealing with parents' issues while also focusing on the child?



## 6 Vignette 6: Understand the parents' view of their child. (2:36 minutes)

*Zulma, a family support worker making a home visit takes the time to understand how Cecilia views Erik and what her goals are for him. (Note: Portions of this vignette are in Spanish and are captioned on screen.)*

***Featured Participants:***

**» Zulma Santos, Family Support Worker, Healthy Families Alexandria, Northern Virginia Family Service, Alexandria, VA**
**» Elsa Cecilia Galvan Delgado and her 7-month-old son, Erik**

EXPLORATION

- What do you see Cecilia, Erik, and Zulma do in this segment?
- How would you describe the fit between Cecilia and Erik?
- How might you continue with Erik's likes and dislikes?
- How would you address the differences in Cecilia's and Erik's temperaments? How and when might you share your own view of Erik?
- In what activities might you engage Erik that would be well-suited to his temperament?

APPLICATION

- What was your reaction to what you just saw?
- What would you do differently if you were in this situation?
- How do you handle it when you and a parent have different ideas about a child's behavior and needs?
- How can you share your differing views of a child's needs while also respecting and encouraging parents to be the experts on their child?

## 7 Vignette 7: Ask for help. (2:20 minutes)

*By asking for help when her relationship with a parent seems to be in trouble a home visitor, turns a relationship-ending situation into a relationship-building situation.*

***Featured Partcipants:***

**» Gwen Pratt Demous and her 8-month-old daughter, "Pebbles"**
**» Lekeyta Bittle, Early Head Start Home Visitor, Dick Howser Center for Early Childhood Development, Tallahassee, FL**
**» Patricia Armstrong, Home-Based Program Specialist, Florida State University Early Head Start, Tallahassee, FL**
**» Trudi Norman-Murch, Southwest Human Development, Phoenix, AZ**

EXPLORATION

- How did taking the time to think about the situation and asking for help from a supervisor help Gwen? Pebbles? Lekeyta? What do you think might have happened if Lekeyta had not reflected on the situation?
- What did Patricia do that helped Lekeyta?
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APPLICATION

- What was your reaction to what you just saw?
- Which are you more likely to do in a difficult situation: react quickly or take time to reflect?
- Think of a time when you reacted to a situation without taking the time to think it through. What was the result? What might have happened differently if you had taken the time to reflect?
- Who can you talk to about your experiences at work when you are discouraged or frustrated?
- Think of a time when you have felt overwhelmed by your work. How did you manage it? What helped?

*This Video Guide was developed by ZERO TO THREE and Toby Levine Communications, Inc., Stockbridge, Massachusetts (Toby Kleban Levine, Managing Editor) and designed by Touch Creative Group, Fairfax, Virginia.*

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*Learning & Growing Together With Families: Seven Ways to Build Strong Relationships*, the 22-minute video which this guide accompanies, produced by ZERO TO THREE in collaboration with the Independent Production Fund, New York, New York, and Toby Levine Communications, Inc.:
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For further information about the other Learning & Growing Together and other ZERO TO THREE products, please contact us at:

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# Seven Ways to Build Strong Relationships

*(22 minutes)*

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